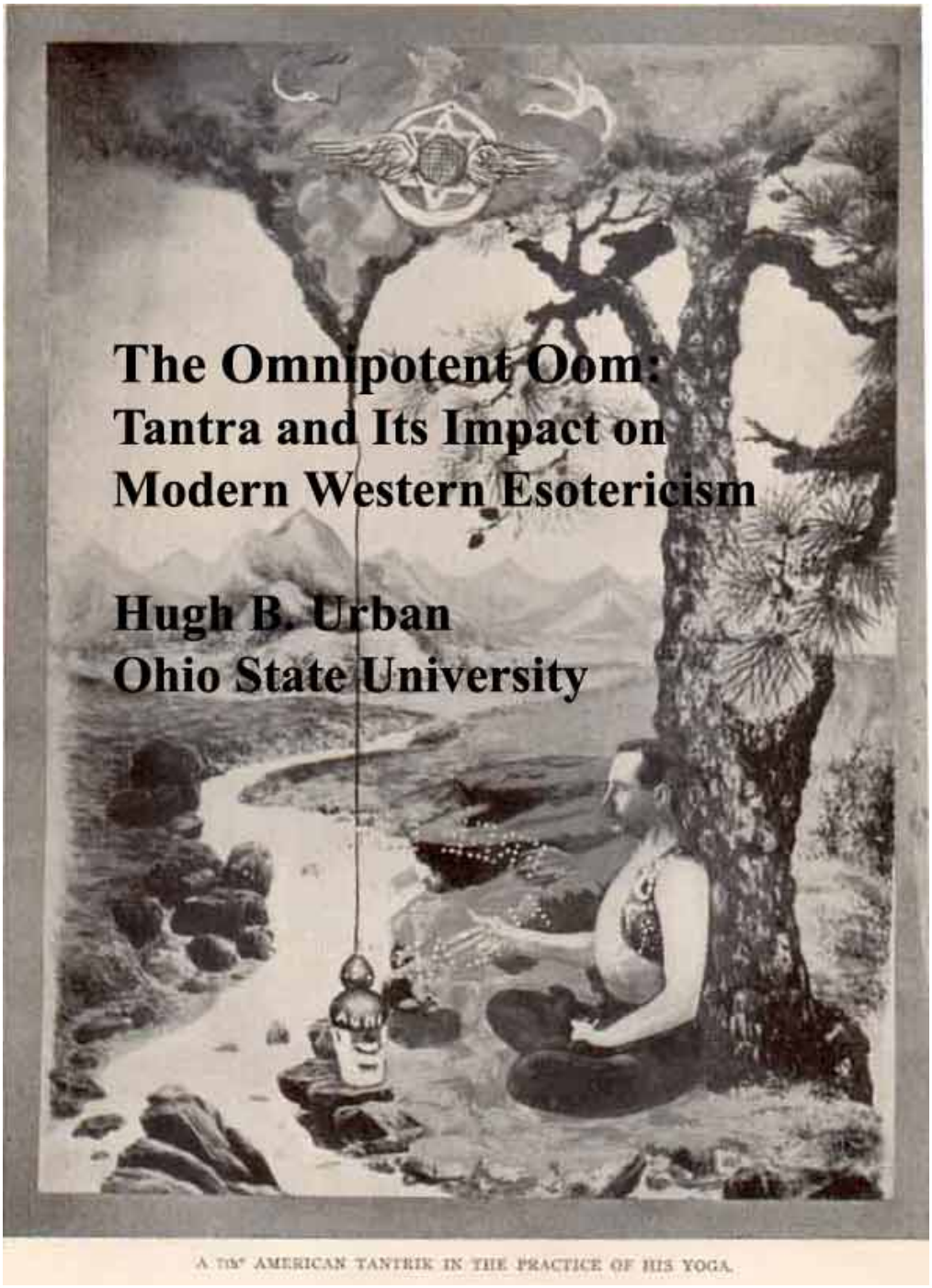

A 7th° AMERICAN TANTRIK IN THE PRACTICE OF HIS YOGA.

THE OMNIPOTENT OOM

Tantra and Its Impact on Modern Western Esotericism

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In this day and age, when matters pertaining to the sexes are generally avoided, and we are taught that the sexual appetite is an animal craving that should be subdued and concealed it is not

surprising that the great majority of persons are blind to the vast importance of the sexual nature [T]hey fail to realize that not only is the cause of our individual existence, but that it is thewell-spring of human life and happiness.
-Dr. Pierre Arnold Bernard, "Tantrik Worship: The Basis of Religion" (1)

Surely few terms in the vocabulary of Eastern religions hold such a tantalizing, titillating or controversial place in the contemporary American imagination as *Tantra*. A word that instantly conjures up images of exotic eroticism, mystical ecstasy and Oriental intrigue, Tantra has entered fully into both contemporary Western scholarship and popular discourse as a whole. Not only are popular entertainers like Sting practicing their own varieties of Tantric sex, (2) but Tantra has now become a major commercial enterprise, spawning entire lines of books, tapes, video, and erotic merchandise. Indeed, I was rather intrigued to discover recently that the phrase "American Tantra" is now a registered trademark, representing a whole line of books, videos and other "ceremonial sensual" merchandise (3).

For most American readers today, Tantra has come to be defined basically as "spiritual sex" or the use of sexuality as a religious experience; as the "exotic art of prolonging your passion play" to achieve "nooky nirvana," it is praised as much a needed liberation of sexuality for a repressive Western world (4). As it is commonly used in popular discourse, Tantra has come to be used almost interchangeably with the erotic techniques described in the Kama Sutra, and frequently identified with a range of Western esoteric practices, such as the erotic rituals of the Ordo Templi Orientis and the sex magic of Aleister Crowley. And yet, rather strikingly, any one who carefully reads any of the classic Sanskrit Tantras quickly realizes that sexual practices play a fairly minor and often very "unsexy" role. Where sexual rituals are discussed it is usually in a very few terse stanzas, which are embedded within hundreds of pages of dry and often dull ritual details (5). In other words, the identification of Tantra with sex and particularly, with scandalous, transgressive and deviant sexuality

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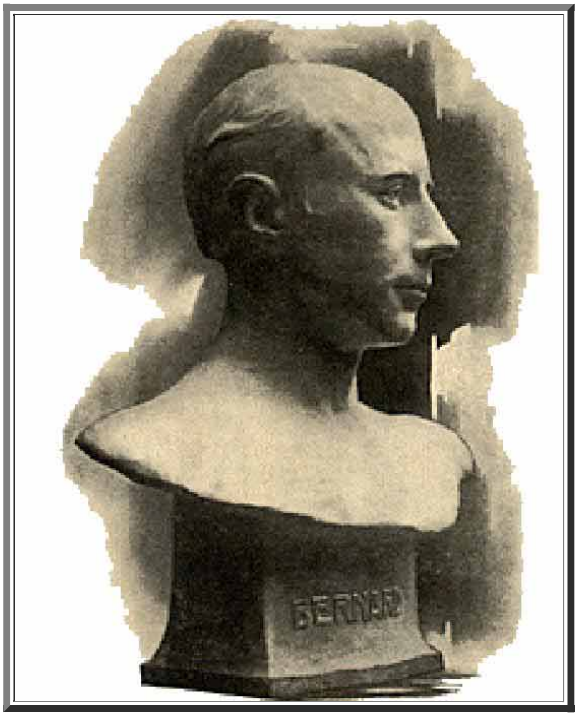
is largely a modern American preoccupation, not a traditional Indian one. So the question is: how did Tantra come to be identified primarily as sacred sex in the American imagination, and how did it come to be associated with Western practices such as Crowleyian sex magic?

Part of the answer, I will argue here, lies in the mysterious life and works of Pierre Arnold Bernard one of the first and most important, yet also today strangely little known figures in the transmission of Tantrism to the West. Known in

the popular American press as "Oom the Omnipotent," Bernard became notorious throughout newspapers and journals as a spiritual leader and philosopher as well as a philanderer, seducer of women and purveyor of scandalous indecencies. Not only did he found the first "Tantrik Order" in America (1906), but he was also the first in a long line of Tantric gurus who would come under intense criticism and suspicion for their alleged immoral, indecent and illegal sexual practices. As such, he has been a seminal influence on much later esotericism in the U.S. not only on later traditions of Western sexual magic, but also on contemporary New Religious Movements, such as the cult of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, the Siddha Yoga Society, and more recent developments like American Tantra," the Church of Tantra and the New Tantrik Order in America.



1. A bust of Pierre Arnold Bernard (c. 1875-1955)

In my discussion of Dr. Bernard and the transmission of Tantra to America, I will borrow some insights from Michel Foucault and others who have examined the role of sexuality in modern Western culture. As Foucault suggests, the men and women of the Victorian era were really not the repressed, puritanical prudes that we commonly imagine them to be today; on the contrary, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed an unprecedented new interest and proliferation of discourse about sexuality, which was not categorized, classified and described in endless detail. "What is peculiar to modern societies is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it ad infinitum, while exploiting it as *the* secret." (6) Above all, as we see in new medical and psychological texts like *Psychopathologia Sexualis*, there was a special interest in forms of non-reproductive sexuality that were now categorized as " deviant," transgressive and antisocial, now labeled with a whole new lexicon of terminology such as homosexuality, necrophilia, nymphomania, spermatorrhea, and so on. As I will argue, the new fascination with Tantra with its explicit use of non-reproductive sexuality, often in violation of laws of class and purity was a key part of this larger obsession with "deviant" forms of sexuality in the Victorian imagination.

After a brief discussion of the Western discovery of Tantra during

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the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (part I), I will examine the life and work of Pierre Bernard, along with all the scandal and controversy that surrounded his mysterious persona (Part II and III). Finally (part IV) will discuss the larger impact of Tantra on Western esotericism in this century, by looking at the gradual synthesis of Western esoteric-sexual practices with the newly

imported Tantric techniques that has taken place over the last one hundred years.

I. FROM "BLACK ART OF THE CRUDEST AND FILTHIEST KIND" TO "THE ART OF SPIRITUAL ECSTASY:" Tantra's Complex Journey to the West

The Tantras [exert] great influence in later days...The worship assumes wild, extravagant forms, generally obscene, sometimes bloody...We cannot go further into detail. It is profoundly saddening to think that such abominations are... are performed as part of divine worship. Conscience, however, is so far alive that these detestable rites are practiced only in secret.
-J. Murray Mitchell and Sir William Muir, *Two Old Faiths* (7)

Adrenalin sex, liquid sex, hard sex, flowing sex, expanded sex, Tantric sex, sacred sex, wet sex, slow sex, ecstatic sex,.. we want it ALL! In expressing sexual energy, we experience the human body's potential for awareness and feelings!...We channel the creative life force flowing through us.
-Paul Ramana Das and Marilena Silbey, "American Tantra" (8)

Tantra, it would seem, lies at a pivotal intersection between Indian and American imaginations, at the nexus of a complex play of representations and misrepresentations between East and West taking place over the last two hundred years. Not only was it a crucial part of the Western "imagining of India," particularly during the colonial era; but it has been no less crucial a part of the "re-imagining of America," particularly during the eras of sexual liberation, feminism, gay rights and sexual politics at the turn of the new millennium.

In most contemporary American imaginations, both popular and scholarly, the word Tantra is almost always associated with the word sex. Defined as the oath of ecstasy, the yoga of sex, Tantra is usually identified as that religious path which combines the physical experience of sexual pleasure with the spiritual experience of liberation. Yet anyone who reads the classic Tantric texts quickly realizes that it often takes quite some time to get to the juicy sexy stuff. In fact, most Sanskrit *tantras* are remarkably dull, dry boring

2. Bernard the Shastri

ritual manuals, and when they do happen to deal with the infamous "fifth M" of Maithuna or sexual intercourse, it is usually just a couple of verses, surrounded by hundreds of pages of technical details (9). In many Tantric schools, *maithuna* is to be taken strictly symbolically, as the union of the individual self with the Supreme Self of Lord Shiva; and when it is taken literally, it is generally

hedged around with strict moral injunctions and ritual safeguards (10). Most traditions, moreover, insist that the semen must absolutely *not* be released in the act of intercourse, but instead *retained and withdrawn* back into the body of the male practitioner. Far from hedonistic abandon, Tantric *maithuna* is in a sense sex in reverse, in which the goal is not orgasmic release, but on the contrary, controlled withdrawal and sublimation (11).

What is most important to the authors of the Indian Tantric literature, I would argue, is not sex, but rather *power* -- power on all levels of reality, spiritual cosmic, physical and socio-political alike. Most Hindu Tantric traditions center around the Goddess Shakti power or energy which circulates throughout all of the manifest universe; she is the creative energy or force which radiates out o the supreme consciousness of Lord Siva, generating the myriad forms of the phenomenal universe. "[T]he Tantric conceives of the world as power (*Shakti*). As the goddess' own self-effulgence, he believes the world is nothing but power to be harnessed" (12).

Thus the task for the Tantric is to arouse and channel the flow of *shakti* or creative energy that circulates through out the universe, the human body and the social order. As Douglas Brooks argues in his study of South Indian Tantra, the primary concern for the Tantrika is

how one might harness and actualize the power perceived to be inherent in all things, including social relations. The dichotomies of impure/pure, and auspicious/ inauspicious are...mechanisms for the expression of...episodic forms of power (13).

Sex may in some traditions be one means of awakening and harnessing power, or one form of its expression in the physical universe; but it is by no means the only or even the most important one. In fact, if one examines most popular vernacular texts on Tantra today, it would seem that by far the most attention is given not to matters of sexual pleasure, but rather to the acquisition of supernatural abilities and achieving all one's worldly desires (14).

So how, then, did "Tantrism" come to be defined primarily as "spiritual sex?" This shift begins, I think, during the early colonial era, with the first discovery of Indian religions by Christian missionaries and Orientalist scholars in the early nineteenth

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century. The Orientalist interest in the Tantras, I would argue, was a part of the much broader concern with sexuality and its aberrations during the Victorian era. As Foucault and others have argued, the men and women of the Victorian era

were by no means simply the puritanical prudes they are commonly imagined to be; on the contrary, the Victorian era witnessed an unprecedented proliferation of discourse about sexuality particularly in its most disturbing, deviant and perverse forms, which were now categorized and classified in intricate detail. "Paradoxically, it was during the nineteenth century that the debate about sexuality exploded. Far from the age of silence and suppression, sexuality became a major issue in Victorian social and political practice" (15).

The first Orientalist authors, such as Sir William Jones and H.T. Colebrooke, actually had relatively little to say about the Tantras. It was really not until the early nineteenth century, with the arrival of Christian missionaries like the Baptist William Ward and the Scotsman, Alexander Duff, that Tantras became objects of intense interest and morbid fascination. Above all, the missionaries singled out the sexual element particularly transgressive and illicit sexuality as the most horrific aspect of the Tantras and the clearest evidence of their complete depravity. The Tantras, as Ward put it, involve "a most shocking mode of worship" centered around the worship of a naked woman (preferably a prostitute or outcast) and rites "too abominable to enter the ears of man and impossible to be revealed to a Christian public" (16).

For later British authors like H.H. Wilson, Sir Monier Williams and many others, the Tantras were then quickly adapted to the larger Orientalist narrative of Indo-European history and the decadence of modern India. According to most Orientalist accounts, the history of Indian culture was a long steady decline from a golden age comparable to ancient Greece and Rome, embodied in the texts of the Vedas, down to a modern era of licentiousness and superstition, embodied in the perverse secret rituals of the Tantras (17). Repeatedly throughout nineteenth century Orientalist literature, we find the Tantras described in the most vivid language as "lust mummery and black magic" (Brian Hodgson), "nonsensical extravagance and absurd gesticulation" (H.H. Wilson), and "black art of the crudest and filthiest kind" in which " a veritable devil's mass is purveyed in various forms" (D.L. Barnett) (18).

This equation of Tantra with sex was only compounded with the Western discovery of the *Kama Sutra* and other erotic manuals. The leading figure in this new interest in Indian erotica was the famous Victorian Orientalist and explorer Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890). Not only did Burton found a small secretive group called the

Kama Shastra Society, but he also privately published the *Kama Sutra* (1883) and the *Ananga Ranga* (1885), the first Hindu treatises on love to be translated into English (texts which could not be officially translated until the mid 1960's) (19). From Burton's time on, it seems, Tantra came to be increasingly associated and often hopelessly confused with the sexual positions of the *Kama Sutra*.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, a few brave scholars made an effort to defend and re-valorize the Tantras, arguing that there is far more to this ancient tradition than mere illicit sexuality. The most important figure in this moralizing reform of Tantra was Sir John Woodroffe, a.k.a. Arthur Avalon, the enigmatic High Court Judge and secret Tantrika, who made it is his life's work to defend the Tantras against their many critics. In Woodroffe's rather sanitized and rationalized account, Tantra is a noble philosophical tradition, basically in line with the Vedas, and even comparable in its symbolism to the liturgy of the Catholic Church (20).

Despite Woodroffe's valiant attempt to present a sanitized and rationalized version of Tantra, however, the mistaken equation of Tantra with sex would persist throughout the Western imagination, both popular and scholarly. And it was soon also identified and mixed with Western sexual-magical traditions, such as the teachings of the mysterious American Rosicrucian and "sex-oriented occultist," Paschal Beverly Randolph, and of course the self-proclaimed "Great Beast, 666," Aleister Crowley, who, many believe, actually had been involved in Tantric practices in India (see below, part IV). One of the key figures in the transmission of Tantra to the West and in the transformation of Tantra into something sexy, scandalous, scintillating and exotic, was the enigmatic Dr. Pierre Arnold Bernard.

II. THE SCANDAL OF OMNIPOTENT OOM:
Dr. Bernard and the Tantrik Order in America

Wily con man, yogi, athlete, bank president, founder of the Tantrik Order in America and the Clarkestown Country Club ...the remarkable "Doctor" Bernard was all of these. He was also the Omnipotent Oom, whose devoted followers included some of the most famous names in America.
-Charles Boswell, "The Great Fuss and Fume Over the Omnipotent Oom" (21)

I'm a curious combination of the businessman and the religious scholar.
-Pierre Arnold Bernard (22)

Pierre Bernard was not only the first man to bring Tantra to America, but was also surely one of the most colorful, unusual and controversial figures in early twentieth century American history (see fig.1). Described as "both a prophet and showman," Bernard was a man "who could lecture on religion with singular penetration and with equal facility stage a big circus, manage a winning ball team or put on an exhibition of magic which rivaled Houdini" (23). Infamous throughout the press as "the Omnipotent Oom," Bernard claimed to have traveled throughout the mystic Orient in order to bring the secret teachings of Tantra to this country and so found the first "Tantrik Order in America" in 1906. Surrounded by controversy and slander regarding the sexual freedom he and his largely female followers were said to enjoy, Bernard is in many ways an epitome of Tantra in its uniquely American incarnations.

Virtually nothing is known about the enigmatic Bernard's early life and background in fact, he seems to have gone to some lengths to conceal his real background behind a strange veil of fictitious identities and false biography, often using the fake persona of "Peter Coons" from Iowa (24). Probably born in 1875 to a middle class family from California, Bernard left home in his teens to work his way to India in order to study the "ancient Sanskrit writings and age old methods of curing diseases of mind and body." After studying in Kashmir and Bengal, he won the title of "Shastri" and was supposedly initiated into the inner mysteries of Tantric practice (see fig.2). Upon returning to America and now introducing himself with the title of "Dr." he worked at various odd jobs in California and began to study hypnotism. By 1900, in fact, he had become moderately famous as a master of self-hypnosis who could use yogic technique to place himself in a state simulating death (fig.3). According to Nik Douglas, it is also likely the Bernard received some instruction in Tantric practice from one Swami Ram Tirath, a young Indian yogi who had come to California in the early 1900s, and who praised Bernard as a man of "profound learning," comparable "with the Brahminical Tantrik High Priests of India" (25).

Beginning in 1904, Bernard had established a clinic in San Francisco where he taught his own versions of self-hypnosis and yoga, which eventually became known as the "Bacchante Academy." Even then, Bernard had become something of a scandal in the California press, who charged that the Academy "catered to young women interested in learning hypnotism and soul charming by which they meant the mysteries of the relations between the sexes" (26). Sometime in the years 1906-7, Bernard also founded the first Tantrik order in America, with an accompanying journal the *International Journal: Tantrik Order*

3. Pierre Bernard simulating his own death.

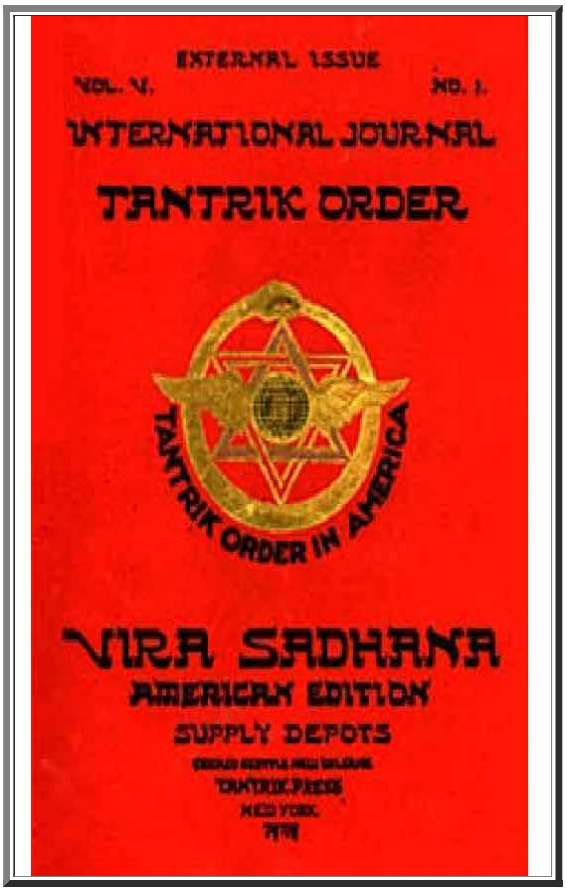
whose charter document for initiation reads as follows (see figs.4-6):

As a tear from heaven he has been dropped into the Ocean of the TANTRIK BROTHERHOOD upon earth and is moored forevermore in the harbor of contentment, at the door to the temple of wisdom wherein are experienced all things; and to him will be unveiled the knowledge of the Most High...

Armed with the key to the sanctuary of divine symbolism wherein are stored the secrets of wisdom and power, he...has proven himself worthy to be entrusted with the knowledge...to soar above the world and look down upon it; to exalt the passions and quicken the imagination...to treat all things with indifference; to know that religion is the worship of man's invisible power... to enjoy well-being, generosity, and popularity...He has learned to love life and know death (27).

After the San Francisco earthquake in 1906, Bernard left California and eventually relocated to New York City, where he would open his "Oriental Sanctum" in 1910. Teaching Hatha Yoga in the downstairs room and offering secret Tantric initiation upstairs, the Oriental sanctum quickly became an object of scandal in the New York press: the notorious "Omnipotent Oom" was charged with kidnapping and briefly imprisoned, though the charges were later dropped. "I cannot tell you how Bernard got control over me or how he gets it over other people," said one of the alleged kidnapees, Zella Hopp, "He is the most wonderful man in the world. No women seem able to resist him (28). Similar controversy surrounded the "New York Sanskrit College," which Bernard founded a few years later in New York. The press reported "wild Oriental music and women's cries, but not those of distress" (29).

By 1918 Bernard and his followers had moved out to a large seventy-two acre estate in Upper Nyack, New York, a former young girls' academy which he renamed the "Clarkstown Country Club" and made the site of his own "utopian Tantric community" (fig.10). A sumptuous property with a 30-roomed Georgian mansion rounded by a wooded mountain and river, the Club was designed to be "a place where the philosopher may dance, and the fool be provided with a thinking cap!" (30) Eventually, he would also purchase a huge property known as the Mooring, with old English country house, and then later open a whole chain of Tantric clinics, including centers in Cleveland, Philadelphia, Chicago and East 53rd Street, New York City, as well as a Tantric summer camp for men in Westhampton, Long Island. His clinics were well known for attracting the wealthiest, most affluent clients,



4. Front page of the *International Journal of the Tantrik Order*

"mostly professional and business men and women from New York," including Ann Vanderbilt, Sir Paul Dukes, composer Cyril Scott and conductor Lepold Stokowski, among many others (31).

According to *Town and Country* magazine of 1941, "Every hour of the day limousines and taxies drove up to the entrance of the Doctor's New York clinic. In the marble foyer behind the wrought-iron portal of 16 East 53rd Street, a pretty secretary handled appointments" (32). Hence, it is not surprising that Bernard quickly achieved a remarkable degree of wealth, fame and status:

Almost overnight, Oom found himself showered with more money than he had ever dreamed of and chieftain of a tribe of both male and female followers ...This tribe at the outset consisted of no more than a dozen members, but eventually it would number well over 200, and would carry on its roster some of the best-known names in America (33).

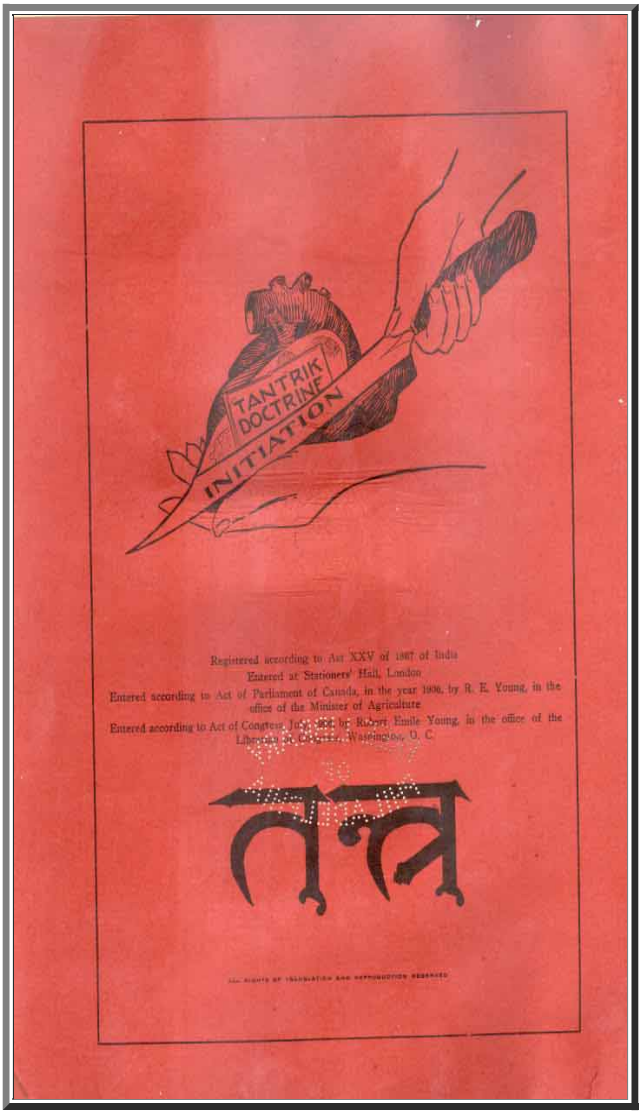
And much of the appeal of Bernard's teachings – as well as the scandal and controvery they generated – centered around his views of love and sexuality.

III. Sex, Secrecy, Slander And Censorship: Bernard's Tantric Teachings and their Reception in the American Popular Imagination

Love, a manifestation of sexual instinct, is the animating spirit of the world.
-Bernard, "Tantrik Worship: The Basis of Religion" (34)

Bernard's Tantric teachings were, however, also surrounded with a certain aura of secrecy and elitism, teachings so profound and potentially dangerous they had to be reserved for the initiated few. Thus the *International Journal, Tantrik Order* quotes the words of Arthur Schopenhauer: "Philosophy should be like the Eleusinian mysteries; for the few, the elite," (35) and it also warns the disciple that "whoever has been initiated, no matter what may be the degree to which he may belong, and shall reveal the sacred formulae, shall be put to death" (36).

According to the police reports of a raid of Bernard's clinic, entry involved a secret signal and complex series of taps on the bell. There also seems to have been a certain hierarchy of disciples, with the lower level initiates performing yoga and physical exercises downstairs, while the "inner circle" called the "Secret Order of Tantriks" engaged in the more esoteric Tantric rituals in the upstairs:



5. Inside cover of Bernard's Tantric journal

Downstairs, they found a bare room where Oom's physical culture clients, paying a $100 bite, toiled through exercises designed to produce the body beautiful. Upstairs, it got more interesting: There,

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on canvas-covered mattresses, Oom's inner-circle clients participated in secret rites of some kind... [T]he upstairs customers, following physical examinations, had to pay large sums and then sign their names in blood before they could be initiated into the cult (37).

The popular press offers us some fairly vivid and probably rather imaginative accounts of Bernard's secret Tantric rituals and the occult initiations into arcane esoteric techniques.

During Tantrik ceremonies, Oom sat on his throne wearing a turban, a silken robe and baggy Turkish pants, and flourished a scepter. While so engaged, he invariably smoked one of the long black cigars to which he was addicted...

A frequent Tantrik ceremony involved the initiation of new members. "To join the order," an Oomite later disclosed, "the novitiate must first have confessed all sins, all secret desires, all inner thoughts; must then promise to abide by Doctor Bernard's orders and must finally take the Tantrik vow."

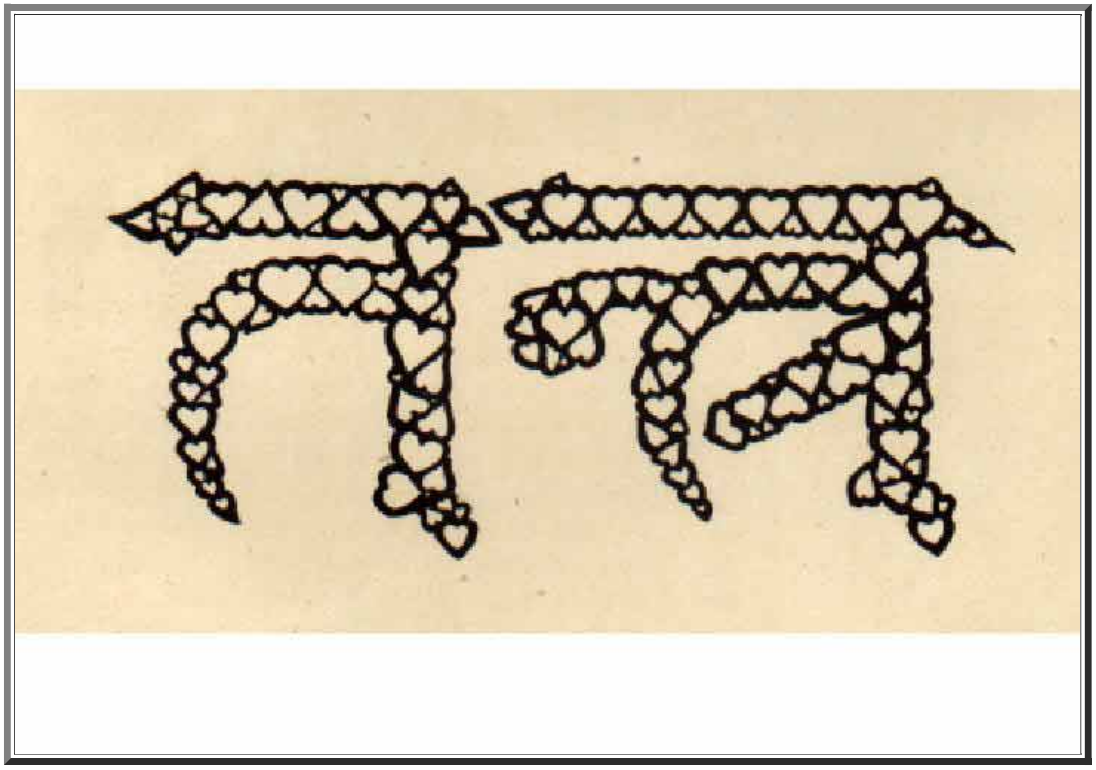
The novitiate looks upon Doctor Bernard as a high priest - indeed, as a sort of man-god. He kneels before Doctor Bernard and recites: "Be to me a living guru; be a loving Tantrik guru." Then all present bow their heads as though in church and repeat in unison: 'Oom man na padma Oom.' It is sung over and over in a chanting monotone, like the beating of drums in a forest, and is supposed...to induce a state of ecstasy (38).

There does appear to have been some real need for the secrecy in Bernard's Tantrik practice – particularly in the context of Victorian attitudes of early twentieth century America (39). According to most of the accounts that came out of Bernard's Nyack country club, much of the spiritual practice there centered around the full enjoyment of the physical body and the complete liberation of sexual pleasure. As we read in the *International Journal, Tantrik Order*, the human body is the supreme creation in this universe and the most perfect place of worship – a truly embodied, sensual worship that requires no churches of stone or external priesthood:

The trained imagination no longer worships before the shrines of churches, pagodas and mosques or there would be blaspheming the greatest, grandest and most sublime temple in the universe, the miracle of miracles, the human body (40).

Like dance or yoga or any other forms of physical expression, sex was, for Bernard, a spiritual discipline and means of both manifesting and attaining the divine within the physical body. "The secret of Bernard's powers," as one observer comments,

6. Bernard's Tantric Oath.



7. The word "Tantra," spelled in devanagari characters using little heart icons, from Bernard's journal.

was "to give his followers a new conception of love...Bernard's aims are...'to teach men and women to love, and make women feel like queens'" (41). Indeed, in his Tantrik journal Bernard spells the word *tantra* in devanagari characters comprised of tiny hearts [!] (see fig.7, above) (42). As we read in the article, "Tantrik Worship," the sex drive is in fact "the animating spirit of the world;"

The animating impulse of all organic life is the sexual instinct. It is that which underlies the struggle for existence in the animal world and is the source of all human endeavor...That affinity which draws the two sexes together for the...production of a new being, that overmastering universal impulse, is the most powerful factor in the human race and has ever been the cause of man's most exalted thought (43).

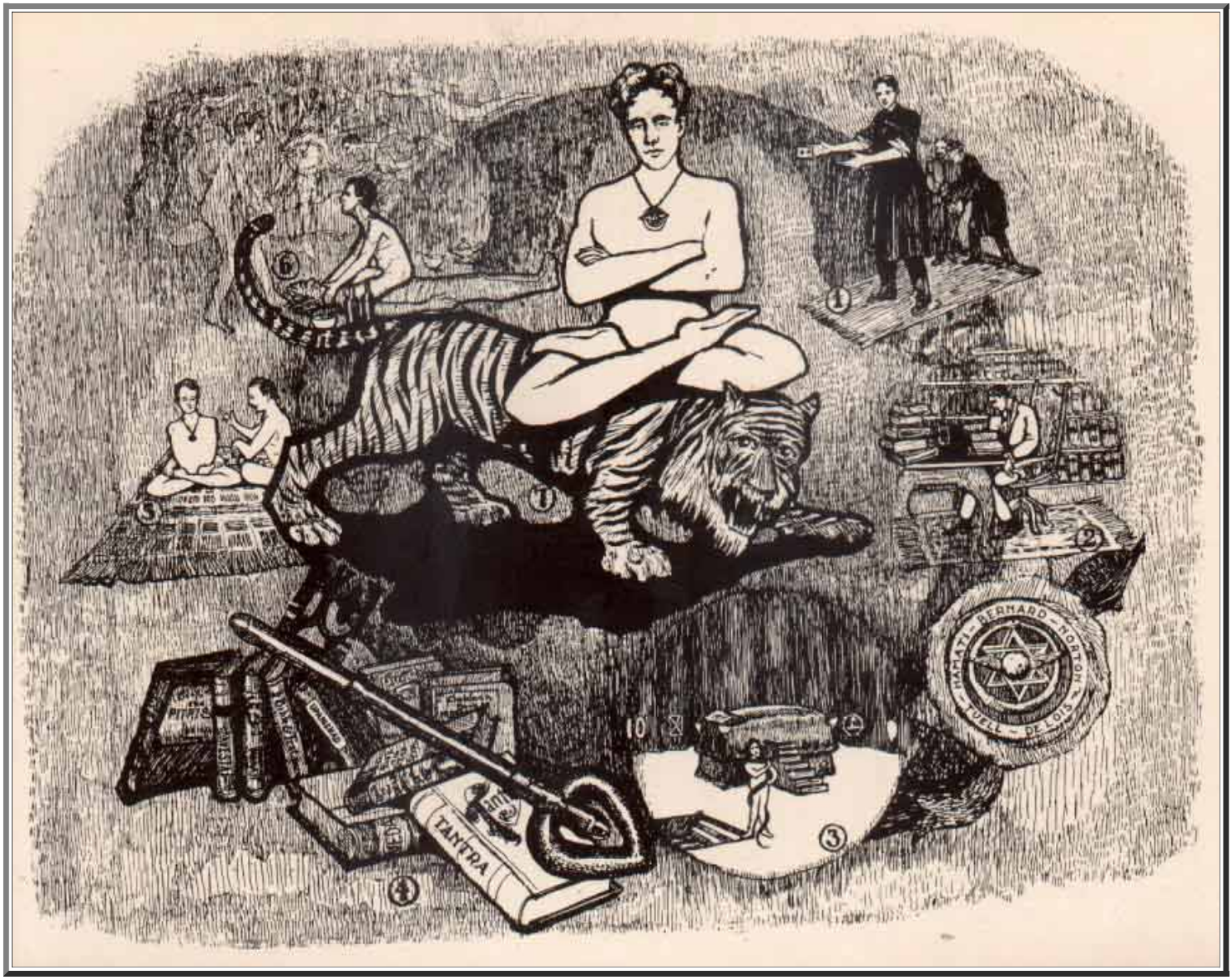
According to Tantrik metaphysics, the physical universe itself is conceived in the sexual union of the great God Shiva and his consort Shakti – respectively the divine light of pure Consciousness and the Creative Power which manifests that radiance. In turn, the union of the male and female in sacramental act of Tantric intercourse is a replication of this divine union, which returns us to the primordial origin of all things. This, Bernard suggests, is the essence of Tantrik worship, embodied in the notorious "fifth M" of *maithuna* or sexual intercourse:

The fifth act of the Tantrik ceremony, the union of the actual man and woman, is held to be the most

important of all. ..It is supposed to symbolize a great cosmic mystery, the production of the universe through the union of purusha and prakriti, a mystery constantly kept before the mind by the worship of the two symbols Linga and Yoni. (44).

Yet in modern Western culture, the profound mysteries of sexual love have been brutally and stupidly repressed, relegated by self-righteous ignorant prudes to the realm of depravity and immorality. Today, "matters pertaining to the sexes are generally avoided, and we are taught that the sexual appetite is an animal craving that should be concealed," such that most Americans now "are blind to the vast importance of the sexual nature" and fail to realize that it is in fact the "well-spring of human life and happiness" (45). According to one disciple's account, Bernard is among the only teachers today who recognizes the natural, spontaneous beauty and power of sex, which is nothing other than an expression of our re-uniting with the Divine:

Sex is discussed naturally... Doctor Bernard believes that men and



8. Tantric stages of progress according to Bernard.

women can learn a lot about living by learning a lot about playing and loving. He teaches the Oriental view of love as opposed to the restrained Western idea. Love, in its physical aspects, is akin to music and poetry. It unites men and women with the infinite (46).

Bernard's wife, Blanche de Vries, also became a student, and eventually a teacher in her own right, of oriental dance, Hatha Yoga and a "watered down version of Tantrism." She would eventually develop her own sort of "Tantric health system," which she marketed very profitably to the wealthy New York upper class society who were increasingly obsessed by matters of physical health and beauty (47). Among her more affluent patrons, for example, was Mrs. Ogden L. Mills, a stepdaughter of the Vanderbilt family. As Mrs. Bernard commented, the Tantric teaching of love is the most-needed remedy to modern America's social ills, most of which derive from repression, prudery and self-denial:

> Half the domestic tragedies...and not a few suicides and murders in America are due to the inherent stupidity of the average Anglo-Saxon man or woman on the subject of love. We will teach them, and make our adventure a great success (48).

Apparently, Bernard also believed that for certain individuals (particularly overly-repressed women of the Victorian era) more drastic surgical measures might be needed to liberate their sexual potential. Sexually unresponsive or "desensitized women" could be helped by a form of partial circumcision in which the clitoral hood was surgically removed an operation believed to improve female receptivity by exposing the clitoral gland to direct stimulation (49).

The popular press of the day, of course, took no end of delight in discussing and sensationalizing Bernard's scandalous Tantric practices, and soon dubbed him the "Loving Guru." Indeed, Bernard's clinics seem to have represent something terribly shocking yet somehow strangely tantalizing in the Victorian imagination something deliciously transgressive in a world where sex for the sake of procreation within heterosexual marriage is the unassailable pillar of decent society: (50)

> The rites are grossly licentious and are most often invoked in veneration of the Sakti, the Hindu goddesses of female energy. But sometimes Oriental men with a yen for one another invoke them just for kicks. A couple skilled in the rites...are supposedly able to make love hour after hour without diminution of male potency and female desire (51).

Hence it seems inevitable that Bernard's Tantric clinics should have

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elicited some complaints from his neighbors and also attracted the attention of the authorities. One F. H. Gans, who occupied an apartment across the way, summed up the neighborhood grievance:

> What my wife and I have seen through the windows of that place is scandalous. We saw men and women in various stages of dishabille. Women's screams mingled with wild Oriental music (52).

In Nyack, where Bernard was an affluent and respected citizen, the authorities apparently received a host of complaints about this scandalous Tantric clinic; reluctantly, the police were forced to investigate and rode into the estate on horseback:

> Nyack concluded Oom was running a love cult. The local prudes clucked and gasped their alarm.

Oom, obviously, was a danger to the young of the community and would have to be run out of town.

But the Nyack police refused to act. Oom was a big taxpayer. So the prudes complained to the New York State Police, then a recently formed, eager-beaver organization mounted on horse. The night they received the complaint, a squad of troopers galloped to Oom's estate and swung down from their saddles near the main building (53).

After his brief rise to celebrity, soon followed by his rapid descent into infamy and scandal, Bernard seems to have retired into a relatively quiet and comfortable later life. Enjoying an affluent lifestyle, Bernard was known for his lavish wedding and anniversary celebrations, his generous patronage of professional baseball and boxing, his investment in sporting venues like a baseball stadiums and dog tracks, as well as his building of an airport. Eventually he would assume a more respectable position in Nyack society, becoming president of the State Bank of Pearl River in 1931. With a fondness for collecting fine automobiles, such as Rolls Royces, Stutzes and Lincolns, Bernard is said to have been worth over twelve million dollars at his peak. "I'm a curious combination of the businessman and the religious scholar," as Bernard once described himself (54). He died in New York City in 1955, at the age of 80.

In sum, we might say that the enigmatic and wonderfully colorful character of Pierre Bernard is of vital importance to the history of American Tantra for at least three reasons. First, he was a bold pioneer in the early transmission of Tantra to America, where it quickly took root and flourished; second, he was one of the first figures in the larger reinterpretation of Tantra as something primarily concerned with sex, physical pleasure and bodily ecstasy; and finally, like so many later American Tantric gurus, he also generated

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intense scandal, slander and censorship from the surrounding American society, foreshadowing Tantra's role in the American imagination as something wonderfully seductive, tantalizing and transgressive. As such, Oom's popular brand of Tantra would help lay the foundation for a new synthesis of Indian Tantric teachniques and Western sexual magic which emerged in the early twentieth century.

IV. SEX MAGICK AND THE YOGA OF SEX: Tantra's Legacy in Modern Western Esotericism

[T]rue Sex-power is God-power.
-Paschal Beverly Randolph, *The Ansairetic*

Mystery (55)

Sex is a sacrament.
-Aleister Crowley, *The Book of Lies* (56)

The Love of Liber Legis is always bold, virile, ecstatic, even orgiastic...Mighty and terrible and glorious as it is, however, it is but the pennon upon the sacred lance of Will.
-"Message from Master Therion," *Constitution of the Ancient Order of Oriental Templars* (57)

Once the seeds of Tantra had been sown in this country, it would seem, they soon began not only to proliferate wildly in the fertile soil of the American imagination, but also to intermingle with a number of existing Western esoteric traditions. Most modern forms of sexual magic, I would argue, are largely the complex fusion of Indian Tantric techniques, as re-interpreted by figures like Bernard, and Western occult movements emerging from the Masonic, Rosicrucian and magical traditions.

Sex, magic and secrecy had, of course, long been associated in the Western religious imagination: from the early Gnostics to the Knights Templar to the Cathars of late medieval Europe, esoteric orders had long been accused of using sexual rituals as part of their secret magical arts (58). However, perhaps the first evidence of a sophisticated and well-documented use of sexual magical techniques cannot be found any earlier than the mid-nineteenth century, with the mysterious figure of Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825-75). A mulatto born of a wealthy Virginian father and a slave form Madagascar, Randolph was raised a poor, self-taught free black in New York city. After running away from home at age sixteen, he traveled the world and eventually emerged as one of the leading figures in the nineteenth century Spiritualist movements, the most famous scryer of his times, as well as America's foremost exponent of magical eroticism or "Affectional Alchemy."

In sexual love, "he saw the greatest hope for the regeneration of the world, the key to personal fulfillment as well as social transformation and the basis of a non-repressive civilization" (59).

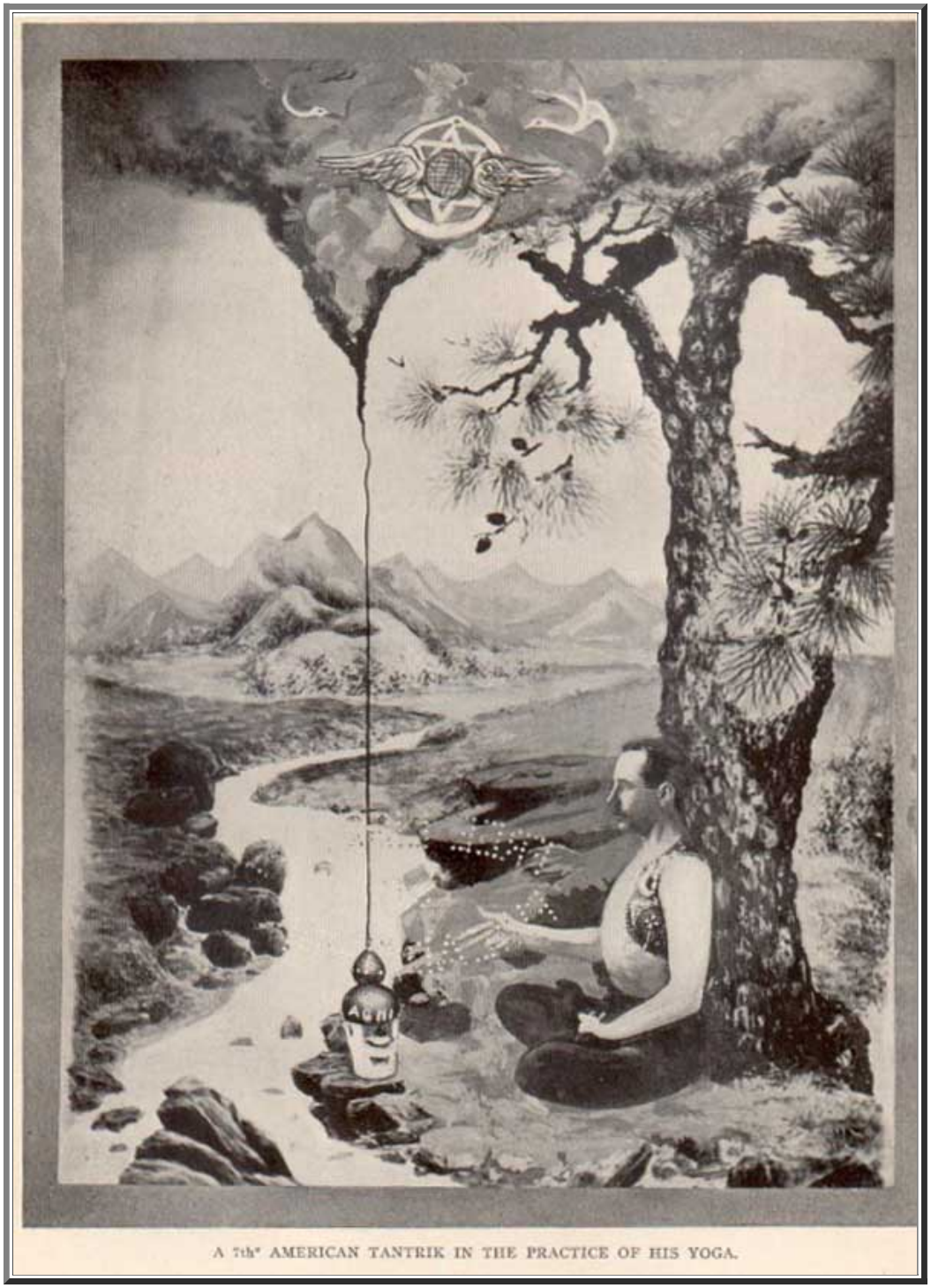
In the course of his wanderings through Europe, the Middle East and Asia, Randolph encountered a wide variety of esoteric traditions not just European Spiritualist, Masonic and Roscicrucian orders, but also a range of Sufis lineages. In fact, he claims to have derived much of his knowledge from a group of Fakirs in the areas of Jerusalem and Bethlehem, which may have been a branch of the unorthodox Muslim mystical order of the Nusa'iri, a group long persecuted by orthodox

Islam because of their alleged Gnostic sexual rituals (60).

Whatever his primary inspiration, Randolph began to teach a form of sexual magic that would have a profound impact on much of later Western esotericism. For Randolph, the experience of sexual orgasm is in fact the critical moment in human consciousness and the key to magical power. As the moment of procreation, when new life is infused from the spiritual realm into the material, it is crucial moment one the soul is suddenly opened up to the spiritual energies of the cosmos: "at the instant of intense mutual orgasm the souls of the partners are opened to the powers of the cosmos and anything then truly willed is accomplished" (61). As such, the experience of sexual climax has the potential to lead the soul either upward or downward, to higher states of spiritual transcendence or to lower, more depraved states of corruption:

The moment when a man discharges his seed, his essential self into a...womb is the most solemn, energetic and powerful moment he can ever know on earth; if under the influence of mere lust it be done, the discharge is suicidal At the moment his seminal glands open, his nostrils expand, and while the seed is going from his soul to her womb he breathes one of two atmospheres, either fetid damnation from the border spaces or Divine Energy from heavens. Whatsoever he shall truly will and internally pray for when Love is in the ascendant, that moment the prayer's response comes down (62).

The power of sex, then, can be deployed for a wide range of both spiritual and material ends. If one can harness the creative energy aroused by sexual contact, he can realize virtually any worldly or otherworldly goal. One can not only achieve the spiritual aims of divine insight, but also attain the mundane goals of physical health, financial success or regaining the passions of a straying lover. According to Randolph, the major uses of sex magic are:



9. An American Tantric yogi: illustration from Bernard's journal.

I. For purposes of increasing the brain and body power of an unborn child, II. Influencing one's wife or husband and magnetically controlling them, III. regaining youthful beauty, energy, vivacity, affectional and magnetic power, IV. prolonging the life of either the subject or actor or either at will, V. attainment of Supreme white magic of will, affection or Love, VI. For the furtherance of financial interests, schemes, lotteries, etc. VII. The attainment of the loftiest insight possible to the earthly soul (63).

One of the most striking features of Randolph's sexual magic, however, is his insistence that both male and female partners must have an active role in the process, and in fact, that both must achieve orgasm – ideally a simultaneous orgasm – in order for the magical operation to successful: "For the prayer to be effective the paroxysm of both is necessary[T]he woman's orgasms should coincide with man's emission, for only in this way will the magic be fulfilled" (64). And the resulting pleasure that both partners feel in this union is nothing less than the overflowing joy of the divine emanating from above like the breath of God himself:

When pleasure results from the meeting of the electric currents of the male with the magnetic flow of the female, in the nerves of each, as in the touch of loving lips, the two currents spread out into waves, which flow all over the nervous network of both until they die out upon the foot of the throne whereon each souls sits in voluptuous expectancy. [T]he joy...is diffused over both beings and each is based in the celestial and divine aura - the breath of God, suffusing both bodies, refreshing both souls! (65)

As we can see here, Randolph's practice of sexual magic is quite fundamentally different from most Indian Tantric traditions (and also, we will see, from the later sex magic of the O.T.O., Crowley and their disciples). Sex, for Randolph, sex is strictly for married couples, in contrast to the explicit violations of caste and marital laws that one often finds in Tantric *maithuna* (66). Moreover, Tantric sexual rituals are generally directed toward the *retention* of the semen, which is to be reversed and drawn back into the body of the male. Most Tantrics have little if anything at all to say about the female body, but describe spiritual union as something to be achieved within the male's divinized consciousness (67). Randolph's sexual magic, conversely, is aimed specifically at the emission of the semen in a moment of mutual climax between both male and female, which releases their combined creative powers. Finally, whereas Tantric union is designed to re-enact the divine union of Shiva and Shakti, the eternal male and female principles

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of the universe, Randolph's sexual magic is intended primarily to achieve certain more realistic aims in this world: to influence the nature of unborn child, to insure good health, and even to attain more mundane material and financial benefits.

But in any case, Randolph's sexual teachings were to have a lasting impact on later Western occult traditions, introducing sexual magic into the mainstream of American esotericism: "Largely through Randolph's influence, the genie had been

released from the bottle; the notion that sex provided the lost key to scattered elements of mythology had taken on a practical side. A multitude of sexual mysticism[s] flourished" (68).

While it seems fairly unlikely that Randolph had any direct knowledge of Tantra, it seems more plausible that several later Western occultists did in particular, the organizers of the highly esoteric movement of the Ordo Templi Orientis. Founded in the late nineteenth century by Carl Kellner (d. 1905) and Theordor Reuss (d. 1923), the O.T.O. became the main conduit through which Western sexual magic began to merge with a (somewhat deformed) version of Indian Tantric practices. A wealthy Austrian chemist and industrialist, Kellner claims to have been initiated into Indian sexual techniques in the course of his own Oriental travels, citing three masters – one Sufi and two Indian yogis, one of whom may have been a Bengali Tantrika. Reuss, too, seems to have had some knowledge of left-hand Tantra, which he cites in his work (69). However, other authors have suggested that Kellner's true inspiration may have been Randolph, whose sexual-magical teachings had been spread to Europe by a group of disciples in the late nineteenth century. Many of Randolph's ideas on sex magic were transmitted to Germany through a little known but extremely influential occult group known as the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, begun by Max Theon (d. 1927) and Peter Davidson (d. 1916) probably sometime in the 1880's (70).

Whatever their origins, much of the O.T.O. ritual appears to have centered around the "inner kernel" of sexual magic – though one already quite different from the more conservative system of Randolph. As the O.T.O. proclaimed in the Masonic journal *Oriflamme* in 1904,

One of the secrets which our order possesses in its highest grades is that it gives members the means to re-erect the temple of Solomon in men, to refind the lost Word... Our Order possesses the Key which unlocks all Masonic and Hermetic secrets, it is the teaching of sexual magic and this teaching explains all the riddles of nature, all Masonic symbolism and all religious systems (71).

The O.T.O. developed a system of nine degrees (later expanded to eleven), the first six of which were more conventional Masonic initiations. The seventh, eight and ninth, however, focused respectively upon the theory of sex magic and on the techniques of auto- and hetero-sexual magic. Homosexual intercourse also appears to have played a central role in the rituals (72). Through the magical act of intercourse, by focusing all one's will and imagination upon a desired goal in

the moment of orgasm, one is said to achieve success in any occult operation, from the invocation of a god to the finding of hidden treasure." One may, for example, use these techniques to magically empower a talisman or other magical object: by focusing one's entire will upon the desired object during the act of auto- or heterosexual orgasm, and then afterwards anointing that object with the semen, one can use that empowered object to achieve virtually any desired end. Similarly, the power of controlled imagination and sexuality can be used to incarnate a god within one's consciousness, by concentrating all one's will on the deity at the moment of orgasm and so "blending their personalities into one" (73). Yet although the sex magic of the O.T.O. may have found some of its inspiration in the techniques of Randolph and his disciples, there would seem to be many fundamental differences between the two. As Godwin points out, the auto-erotic and homosexual techniques developed by Kellner and Reuss would have horrified the far more reserved Randolph, for whom sex was a sacrament between married couples, strictly guarded by ritual sanctity and moral injunctions (74).

Surely the most infamous member of the O.T.O. was the notorious magician and self-proclaimed Great Beast, 666, Aleister Crowley (1875-1947). And it is with Crowley that we find the first clear examples of Western sexual magic being combined (and perhaps hopelessly confused) with Indian Tantric practices. Born the son of a minister in the highly puritanical Plymouth Brethren sect, Crowley is in many ways an exemplar of the Victorian age as a whole raised in prudish repression and turning later to extremes of sexual excess. Following Nietszche in his fierce rejection of Christianity as emasculated and weak, he "declared that all orthodox religions are rubbish, and that the sole true gods are the sun and his vice-regent, the penis" (75). A poet, novelist, and accomplished mountain-climber, Crowley would also become one of the most reviled characters of the early twentieth century. And much like Bernard's, Crowley infamy and scandal would center above all around his sexual practices.

His most recent biographer, Lawrence Sutin, suggests that Crowley may have first learned Tantric Vamachara practices in Ceylon as early 1901 while studying Buddhism; yet he seems to have been initially quite repulsed by them, describing "these follies of Vamacharya (debauchery)" as "evocations of the evil ones, things

unlawful to write of, dangerous even to think of" (76). His attitudes toward such rituals appear to have changed dramatically in the next few years, however, when he began to experiment in sexual magic of his own. Already in 1902, Crowley and his partner Rose had begun to engage in a series of what Sutin calls "secret rites, of a sexual nature (and related to Tantric practices, such as the emulation of the passive Shiva in cosmic coupling with the mounted energetic Shakti)" (77). Other authors think Crowley may been even more deeply involved in left-hand Tantric rituals during his travels in India. In 1936, Elizabeth Sharpe published a semi-fictional, semi-autobiographical account entitled *Secrets of the Kaula Circle*, which describes a mysterious Englishman calling himself by the number "666," who engages in a variety of the most esoteric Tantric rites. Nik Douglas concludes that this is clearly a reference to Crowley and is evidence that he had extensive knowledge of Tantric techniques (78) (though it seems equally likely that Sharpe has worked the infamous Beast 666 as a fictional character into her own imaginative narrative).

Yet whatever their precise origin, sexual practices clearly formed an integral part of Crowley's magical repertoire. And they appear to have become particularly central during the years of his involvement with the O.T.O. After reading his *Book of Lies* in 1912, Theodor Reuss allegedly contacted Crowley and accused him of revealing the innermost secret of the O.T.O – namely, the secret of sexual magic. Though Crowley had apparently done so unintentionally, the story goes, he was named the Sovereign Grand Master General of Ireland, Ioana and all the Britains. In his *Confessions*, Crowley discusses the nine degrees of the O.T.O.'s initiations, together with the two he later added, and also pointed to this innermost kernel of sexual magic which lay at the heart of the higher degrees:

[I]f this secret [of sexual magic] which is a scientific secret were perfectly understood, as it is not by me after more than twelve years' almost constant study and experiment, there would be nothing which the human imagination can conceive that could not be realized in practice...If it were desired to have an element of atomic weight six times that of uranium that element could be produced (79).

Thus in his magical rites, Crowley calls not for any ascetic withdrawal or denial of the flesh, but rather for the fullest celebration of the body, with all its desires, in the ceremony of Love:

Then comes the call of the Great Goddess, Nuit, Lady of the Starry Heaven 'Come forth, O children under the stars and take your fill of

love! I am above you and in you. My ecstasy is in yours - For I am divided for love's sake, for the chance of union' Is ours the gloomy asceticism of the Christian and the Buddhist and the Hindu? Are we walking in eternal fear lest some 'sin' should cut us off from 'grace'? By no means: Dress ye all in fine apparel, eat rich foods and drink sweet wines that foam! Also take your fill of and will of love as ye will when, where and with whom ye will!" (80).

Crowley's most intense period of experimentation in sexual magic appears to have begun in 1914, during his "Paris Workings." Together with his homosexual lover, the poet Victor Neuberg, Crowley engaged in a variety of sexual rites intended to achieve both spiritual and material ends – both the primary goal of "invoking the gods Jupiter and Mercury and the secondary one of getting these gods to supply Crowley and Neuberg with money" (81). As Julius Evola suggests, Crowley saw in orgasm (as in drug experience) a means to create "openings or breakages of consciousness" that give the soul access to supersensual and ecstatic states (82). However, as others point out, Crowley was perhaps more often concerned with the efficacy of sexual techniques in "obtaining wealth or anything else the magician might desire" (83). For example, Crowley suggests that one might use sexual magic to "perform an operation to have $20,000;" by focusing all one's will upon an object at the moment of orgasm, one can powerfully influence the course of events and achieve the desired goal.

The purpose of these operations of High Magick Art was to obtain priestly power and, on a lower plane, money. It would be a mistake to think that the celebrants were performing the rites for sexual pleasure. The aim was congress with gods. When signs of success began to appear, Crowley took pains to record, 'it is to be noted that since the beginning of this operation the Bank rate has fallen to 3 percent and Consols improved from 71 1/2 to 76 1/4, a gain of over 1400 pounds to OSV. On Saturday OSV received a letter which should bring in 500 pounds within the next 2 months' (84).

However, the ultimate goal that Crowley sought through his sexual magical practices seems to have gone far beyond the mundane desire for material wealth; indeed, in his most exalted moments, Crowley appears to have believed that he could achieve the birth of a divine child a spiritual, immortal, godlike being, who would transcend the moral failings of the body born of mere woman. This goal of creating an inner immortal fetus, Crowley suggests, lies at the heart of many esoteric traditions, from ancient Mesopotamia to India to the Arab world:

> This is the great idea of magicians in all times - To obtain a Messiah by some adaptation of the sexual process. In Assyria they tried incest...Greeks and Syrians mostly bestiality. This idea came from India...The Mohammedans tried homosexuality; medieval philosophers tried to produce homunculi by making chemical experiments with semen. But the root idea is that any form of procreation other than normal is likely produce results of a magical character (85).

Now, if it is possible that Crowley did indeed have some contact with Indian Tantra and that he did drawn some of his sexual practice from Eastern sources, we must ask, to what degree is his magic genuinely based on Hindu Tantra and to what degree is it his own creative re-interpretation? As Francis King suggests, many of Crowley's ideas regarding the creative power of Genius do bear some resemblance to Tantric ideas of the semen (*bindu*) as a creative power, operative on both the spiritual and physical planes (86). Yet as others point out, there also profound differences between Crowleyian sex magic and Indian Tantric techniques. Not only did Crowley's magic involve homosexual intercourse – something almost never found in Tantric rituals (87); but more importantly, as we have already noted, Tantric *maithuna* is based on the retention of the semen, whereas Crowley's, like that of Randolph and the O.T.O. before him, is based on the release of semen and the creative power of the emitted seed.

Tantrism and Chinese Taoist tradition call for retention of semen by the male, even in the heights of sexual union. Crowley followed the alchemical tradition which regarded the fluidic commingling as an elixir which...could heighten both one's physical and spiritual state (88).

Secondly, whereas the ultimate aim of Tantric yoga is the union of Shiva and Shakti within the body of the practitioner, the ultimate aim of Crowley's sexual magic was not simply divine union, but the conception of a kind of magical fetus or spiritual child:

> The principal difference between Crowley's sexual magic and traditional Tantric techniques now becomes clear. For Crowley, the object of the ritual was not limited to mystic union with the goddess - but could further involve the creation of a new spiritual form – a magical child. This magical child could be any form of concentrated inspiration, or it could manifest physically as a talisman or even within human being – as in a newborn baby or a newly spiritually

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> transformed adult man (89).

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Thus, we might say that the magical and sexual career of Aleister Crowley was in many ways parallel to that of the founder of the Tantrik Order in America, Dr. Pierre Arnold Bernard – and in fact, the two did also briefly intersect. Not only do many of Crowley's teachings on sexual magic do seem to bear some superficial resemblance to those of Bernard's American Tantra, but it would seem that Crowley also had some direct contact with the members of the Tantrik Order in the 1920's. Crowley was first introduced to his infamous "Scarlet Woman," Leah Hirsig, in New York in 1918 by her sister Alma, Alma, it seems, was a direct disciple of Bernard and deeply involved in his Tantrik Order in New York; however, she would later go on to publish her own exposé of Bernard's group, under the pseudonym of Marion Dockerill, entitled, *My Life in a Love Cult: a Warning to All Young Girls* (1928).

Alma was intensely interested in the occult and would go on – in the 1920s –to become a disciple of a master named Pierre Bernard, who called himself Oom the Omniponent and taught the members of his 'Secret Order of Tantriks' a form of sexual magic. Alma served for a time as the High Priestess of Oom, but later recantedThere areobvious parallels in the paths of Alma as High Priestess and Leah as Scarlet Woman (90).

This parallel between the sister-consorts of Crowley and Bernard is quite fitting: after all, both Crowley and Bernard were to become notorious in the American popular imagination as High Priests of secret Tantric rituals; and both would soon face intense scandal, slander and media attack, largely because of their illicit and immoral sexual practices.

Together, Crowley and Bernard were instrumental in the transmission of Tantra to the West and in its profound transformation as it became increasingly confused with Western sexual magic. The influence of Crowley and Bernard has been at least threefold. First, they were both key figures in the *sensationalization* of Tantra in the popular imagination, as it became an increasing object of scandal and media exploitation during the Victorian era. Second, both were key figures in *the re- (or mis-) interpretation* of Tantra. In its transmission to the West, Tantra was transformed from a tradition concerned primarily with secrecy and power to one focused on the optimization of sexual orgasm. And finally, the combined influence of Crowley and Bernard led to the increasing fusion – and arguably gross confusion of Western

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esoteric traditions with Indian Tantra. Today, one need only browse the shelves of any New Age book store to find a range of magazines, videos

and texts bearing titles like *Tantra without Tears, Sex, Magic, Tantra and Tarot*, and *Secrets of Western Tantra* – most of which are based on the fundamental equation of Indian Tantric techniques and Crowleyian-style sexual magic (91).

EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSIONS: Tantra, American Style

[T]he sexual instinct...is the source of all human endeavor.
-Pierre Arnold Bernard (92)

In the orgasmal moment there is no middle-ground; for we either rise toward heaven or descend hellward. At its close we are either better or worse generally worse than before...The ejective moment...is the most tremendously important one in the human career ..for not only may we launch Genius, Power, Beauty, Deformity, Crime , Idiocy, Shame or Glory on the great sea of lifebut we may plunge our own souls neck deep in Hell's horrid slime, or mount the Azure as associate Gods.
-Paschal Beverly Randolph (93)

Sex is one of the most (some say THE most) powerful energies on the planet. Within our loins lies an energy that has the potential to create ANY reality we want. Religion has done much to suppress our divine sexual nature and has kept the masses ignorant of the potential uses of sexual energy.... Sex Magic is based on the belief that the most powerful moment of human existence is the orgasm. Sex Magic is the art of utilizing sexual orgasm to create a reality and/or expand consciousness. It is a moment when a window opens to the unlimited abundance of the unlimited universe.
-Jeffrey Tye, "Tantra: Sex Magic" (94)

To conclude, I would just like to make a few comments on the legacy of Bernard, Crowley and their disciples in later twentieth century Western esotericism, occultism and New Age traditions. In the course of its transmission to the U.S., the Tantric tradition appears to have undergone a number of profound transformations. This highly esoteric traditon, concerned primarily with the acquisition of supernatural power, has been progressively redefined as a technique to optimize sensual pleasure and sexual potency. At the same time, this same tradition that was once reviled by the early European Orientalists has now come to be celebrated by contemporary scholars and New Age enthusiasts alike.

10. Bernard's "Clarkstown Country Club"

No longer dismissed as "Hinduism at its last and worst stage of development," Tantra is now conceived as a much-needed liberation of the body, femininity and sexuality which will provide the cure to a repressive modern Western world.

Above all, since the so-called sexual revolution of the 1960s, both India Tantra and Western sexual magical traditions have entered in full force into the American popular imagination. "[V]iolence, drugs and sex, three major preoccupations of the 1960s and 70s, blended in the image of youth in revolt" (95); and the literature on Tantra was a key element in the new rhetoric of sexual freedom. Thus in 1964 , we see the publication of Omar Garrison's widely read *Tantra: the Yoga of Sex*, which advocates Tantric techniques as the surest means to achieve extended orgasm and optimal sexual pleasure: "Through... the principles of Tantra Yoga, man can achieve the sexual potency which enables him to extend the ecstasy crowning sexual union for an hour or more, rather than for the brief seconds he now knows (96).

At the same time, Tantra began to enter into the Western popular imagination in a huge way, as popular entertainers, musicians and poets began to take an active interest in this exotic erotic brand of Eastern spirituality. This had already begun with the beat poets like Allen Ginsberg – one of the first Western hippies to begin to flood into India in the 60s who saw Tantra as one of many ways of breaking through the repressive morality of middle class American society (97). And in 1968, even Mick Jagger would make a film called "Tantra," as a psychedelic journey through the five M's. By the 1970s, Tantra had come to be more or less synonymous with liberation and freedom on every level spiritual, social and political alike. According to a common narrative, repeated ad nauseam by advocates of alternative spirituality, our natural sexual instincts have long been repressed by the distorted morality of Western society and the Church. "For centuries organized religions have used guilt about sex as a way of exploiting people and the recent liberalization of sexuality has not yet succeeded in erasing this cruel legacy;" therefore, Tantra is the most needed spiritual path for our age, the path which will help to liberate our repressed sexuality and re-reintegrate our bodies and spirits: "Sexual liberation implies the liberation of the whole being: body, mind and spirit" (98). Thus from the 1970s on, we see the rise of a whole series of "Neo-Tantric" Gurus, such as Swami Muktananda, Chogyam Trungpa, Da Free John and others, who explicitly wedded Indian sexual practices with Western spiritual ideals. Perhaps the most famous of these was Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, the notorious sex Guru and Guru of the Rich, who marketed an extremely lucrative brand of Neo-Tantrism through his ranch in Antelope, Oregon (99).

Finally, in our own generation, Tantra appears to have come full

circle, as we find an even more explicit identification of Indian Tantric traditions with Western sexual magic. "Sex magic is what we now call American Tantra," as one enthusiastic couple proclaims (100). Not only may we peruse any number of texts on the *Secrets of Western Tantra*, but we may also learn the techniques of Tantric sex magic on-line, through websites such as the "Church of Tantra" and "Tantra.com." As Fra. Geh Mad exhorts in his "Developmental Techniques for Tantra/ Sex Magic," "Thou Art God(des)...THERE ARE NO LIMITS! PLAY HARD AND BE SAFE!" (101). One is thus tempted to agree with Peter Koenig that what we are witnessing is a kind of "McDonaldisation of occultism," transmitting a form of "McGnosis" based on Crowleyian "illumination through sex-magic." "It is only a matter of time before we see the 'Caliphate' not only selling T-shirts with the O.T.O.-lamen and [at one time via www.venus.com] pornography but also frozen 'Amrita' (a sexual-secretion cocktail) over the Internet (102).

The most striking illustration of this contemporary revival of Tantra as sex magic is Nik Douglas' re-creation of the Tantrik Order in America originally begun by Pierre Bernard. Indeed, Douglas now offers on-line initiations into the "Secret" teachings of his New Tantric Order, providing an "UPDATED NEW TANTRIC ORDER DOCUMENT (1996)," which brings Bernard's own 1906 document somewhat more into line with contemporary American concerns:

TantraWorks offers membership in the "New Tantric Order", which will offer participants the opportunity to advance through personalized Tantra initiations and allow access to all the Tantra database, on this Web Site (103).

In this sense, Tantra would seem to play much the same role in the modern imagination as did "sexuality" itself during the Victorian era, as Foucault has so insightfully described it. Far from simply prudish and repressive, the Victorian era was in fact pervaded by a deeper interest in and endless discourse about sexuality, which was exploited as "*the* secret." Conversely, our own generation the generation of we "other Victorians" is seemingly obsessed with the rhetoric of "liberation," coming out of the closet and freeing ourselves from the prudish bonds of the Victorian era. Foucault wrote:

If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition...then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such language places himself...outside the reach of power...We are conscious of

defying established power...We know we are being subversive.What stimulates our eagerness to speak of sex in terms of repression is doubtless this opportunity to speak out against the powers that be, to utter truths and promise bliss, to link together enlightenment, liberation and manifold pleasures (104).

So too, I would argue, much of the contemporary rhetoric about the repression or censorship of both Tantra and Sex Magic reflects a similar obsession with sexuality and a similar claim to "liberate" it from the prudish Victorian biases of our scholarly forefathers.

Unfortunately, it would seem that in our enthusiasm for "liberation," we have not only increasingly confused Indian Tantra with Western magical practices, but probably also grossly misunderstood both traditions in the process. Our American fascination with sex magic seems to have less to do with any actual Eastern tradition than it does with our own uniquely American fantasies, obsessions and repressed desires. Sex, so far as I can tell, is really not a central pre-occupation in most Tantric texts, where secrecy and the acquisition of power are typically far more important. 'Tantric' sex and its like is largely a twentieth century American preoccupation, and one that continues to drive us in our own "primitive passion" for the elusive ideal of bodily and spiritual ecstasy.

ENDNOTES

[1] Bernard, "Tantrik Worship: The Basis of Religion," *International Journal, Tantrik Order* 5, no.1 (1906): 71.

[2] Cosmo quotes Sting on his own Tantric practices, "[Our sex lasts] seven hours and includes dinner and a movie" (Lynn Collins, "The Secret to Tantric Sex," *Cosmopolitan* [May, 2000]: 243).

[3] Paul Ramana Das and Marilena Silbey, "Celebrating Sacred Sexuality," reprinted on the Church of Tantra web-site (

http://www.tantra.org/amertan.html). On contemporary New Age appropriations of Tantra, see Hugh B. Urban, "The Cult of Ecstasy: Tantra, the New Age and the Spiritual Logic of Late Capitalism," *History of Religions* 39 (2000): 268-304.

[4] Collins, "The Secret to Tantric Sex," p.240. As Phillip Rawson enthusiastically proclaims, "in complete contrast to the strenuous 'No' that official Brahmin tradition said to the world, Tantra says an emphatic...'Yes!' ...Instead of suppressing pleasure...and ecstasy, they should be cultivated and used" (*The Art of Tantra* [Greenwich: New York Graphic Society, 1973], p.10).

[5] See for example the useful definition provided by Douglas Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities: An Introduction to Hindu Sakta Tantra* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 55-72. As. N.N. Bhattacharya comments, "Most modern writers on this subject insist solely on its sexual elements, minimal though they are ...and popularize modern ideas pertaining to sex problems in the name of Tantra. The historical study of Tantrism has been handicapped...by the preoccupation of those working in the field" (*History of the Tantric Religion: A Historical, Ritualistic and Philosophical study* [Delhi: Manohar, 1982], p.v).

[6] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, volume I, an Introduction* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), p.35. Cf. Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, J.R. Carrette, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), p.117f; Angus McLaren, *Twentieth Century Sexuality: A History* (London: Blackwell 1999); Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics*

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and Society: the Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800 (London: Longon, 1981).

[7] J. Murray Mitchell and Sir William Muir, *Two Old Faiths: Essays on the Religion of the Hindus ad the Mohammednans,* (New York, Chautauqua Press, 1891), pp.53-4.

[8] From the "Third Millennium Magic" web-site (http://www.3mmagic.com/at_main.html).

[9] "The so-called sexual revolution of the last two decades in Europe and North America has brought about a renewed interest in the Tantric tradition....Notwithstanding the publications of sumptuously illustrated books...it would not be untrue to apply a Bengali saying to the state of Tantric studies: that it has remained in the same darkness in which it always was...We have gone from one extreme to the other. While early scholars were unnecessarily apologetic about the

sexual...practices of Tantra, modern scholars revel in the sexual aspects and have coined such colorful expressions as 'cult of ecstasy'" (Pratapaditya Pal, *Hindu Religion and Iconology According to the Tantrasara* [Los Angeles: Vichitra Press, 1981], p.vi).

[10] Thus the *Kularnava Tantra* states that "true sexual union is the union of the Parashakti with the Atman [Self]; other unions represent only carnal relations with women" (5.111-2, in Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971], p.262).

[11] On the technique of *vajroli* or the retention and sublimation of the semen, see David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India*(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp.199-201. "*maithuna* is never allowed to terminate in an emission of semen Otherwise the yogin falls under the law of time and death like any common libertine" (Eliade, *Yoga,* p.267-8). Many Tantric techniques also involve, not just retention of semen, but the actual *extraction* of the vaginal fluids from the partner into the male body. According to the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika,* "The semen that is about to fall into the woman's vagina should be drawn back up ...If already fallen he should draw up his own semen [together with the woman's secretions] and preserve it...When the semen drops death ensues. By holding the semen there is life" (Georg Feuerstein, *Tantra: The Path of Ecstasy* [Boston: Shambhala,

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1998], p.233).

[12] See Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom: The Texts and Traditions of Srividya Sakta Tantrism in South India* (Albany: SUNY 1992), p.xix; cf. Sir John Woodroffe, *Shakti and Shakta* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1975), p.158f; Alexis Sanderson, "Purity and Power among the Brahmins of Kashmir," in *The Category of the Person: Anthropological and Philosophical Perspectives*, eds. M.Carrithers, S. Collins and S.Lukes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[13] Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom*, p.149.

[14] See Hugh B.. Urban and Glen A. Hayes, eds., *In the Flesh: Eros, Secrecy and Power in the Vernacular Tantras of India*(Albany: SUNY, forthcoming); Hugh B. Urban, "The Remnants of Desire: Sacrificial Violence and Sexual Excess in the Cult of the Kapalikas and in the Writings of Georges Bataille," *Religion* 25 (1995): 76-90.

[15]Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society,* p.6-7; cf. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, v.I,* pp.45ff.

[16] Ward, *A View of the History, Literature and Religion of the Hindoos* (London: Kinsbury, Parbury and Allen 1817), v.I, p.247. On the genealogy of Tantra during this period, see Hugh B. Urban, "The Extreme Orient: The Construction of 'Tantrism' as a Category in the Orientalist Imagination," *Religion* 29 (1999): 123-46.

[17] See Urban, "The Extreme Orient," pp.123-46. "Tantra...was regarded as an extreme example of the degeneration...believed to have affected Hindu religion since its glorious classical past in the Aryan civilization" (Kathleen Taylor, "Arthur Avalon: The Creation of a Legendary Orientalist," in Julia Leslie, ed. *Myth and Mythmaking* [Richmond: Curzon, 1996], p.151).

[18] Quoted in Woodroffe, ed., *Principles of Tantra: The Tantratattva of Sriyukta Siva Candra Vidyarnava Bhattacarya Mahodaya* (Madras: Ganesh & Co, 1960), pp.3-5.

[19] Nik Douglas, *Spiritual Sex: Secrets of Tantra from the Ice Age to the New Millennium* (New York: Pocket Books, 1997), p. 183-4.

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[20] On Woodroffe, see Taylor, "Arthur Avalon," pp.150ff, and Urban, "The Extreme Orient," pp.134-7. According to Woodroffe, "The Sakta Tantra simply present the Vedantik teachings in a symbolic form for the worshipper, to whom it prescribes the means whereby they may be realized in fact" (*Shakti and Shakta*, pp.587). In his *Principles of Tantra,* for example, Woodroffe' provides a detailed, point-for-point comparison of the liturgy of the Catholic Mass and a Tantric ritual (p.63f).

[21] Boswell, "The Great Fuss and Fume Over the Omnipotent Oom," *True: The Man's Magazine,* (January 1965): 31.

[22] Bernard, quoted in Douglas *Spiritual Sex*, p.204.

[23] Dr. Charles Potter, *World Telegram* (May 7, 1931), cited in William Seabrook, *Witchcraft: Its Power in the World Today*(New York: Harcourt Brace, 1940), p.359. As Monica Randall comments, "the new media followed his every move. He was a showman an occultist with psychic abilities that were astonishing. He delighted in bizarre publicity stunts[N]eighbors accused him of hosting orgies and abducting virgins to sacrifice to his elephants" (*Phantoms of the Hudson Valley: the Glorious Estates of a Lost Era* [Woodstock: Overlook Press, 1995], p. 78).

[24] The few studies of Bernard's life and works include Nik Douglas' discussion in *Spiritual Sex*,

pp.191ff and the web-site devoted to him at www.vanderbilt.edu/~stringer/pab.htm. The latter includes a fairly extensive bibliography of all the published materials on Bernard. The most interesting of these include contemporary newspaper reports, such as: "Oom: Omnipotent Doctor Bernard Makes News Again," *Newsweek* (July 1, 1933): 22; John Lardner, "Out of a Book," *Newsweek* (May 19, 1939): 24; Eckert Goodman, "The Guru of Nyack: The True Story of Father India, the Omnipotent Oom," *Town & Country* (April, 1941): 50, 53,92-3 ,98-100; "Oom's Animals: Nyack Summer Theater Performs in Yoga Disciple's Private Zoo," *Life Magazine* 17 (1942): "The Ascent of Peter Coon," *Newsweek* 46 (October 10, 1955): 46ff; 53-6; Kenneth R. MacCalman "Impressions of Dr. Bernard and the C.C.C. as Viewed by a Nyack On Looker," *South of the Mountains* 14, no. 4 (1970): 2-8. There is also some recent scholarly literature which deals briefly

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with Bernard, such as: J. Gordon Melton, "Pierre Bernard." In *Biographical Dictionary of American Cult and Sect Leaders* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986), pp. 32-3, 138; "Pierre Bernard," in *New Age Almanac,* J. Gordon Melton, ed. (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 1991). pp. 150 153; "Tantrik Order in America," in *Encyclopedia of American Religions*, J. Gordon Melton, ed. (Detroit: Gale Research, Inc., 1989), p.164; Gary L. Ward, "Pierre Arnold Bernard (Tantrik Order in America)," in *Religious Leaders of America: A Biographical Guide to Founders and Leaders of Religious Bodies, Churches, and Spiritual Groups in North America*, ed. J. Gordon Melton (Detroit: Gale Research, Inc., 1991), pp. 39-40; "Bernard, Pierre," in *The Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*, ed. Leslie Shepard (Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1991), pp. 175-6; William Seabrook, *Witchcraft: It's Power in the World Today* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1940), pp. 354-359; Francis King, *Sexuality, Magic and Perversion* (Secacus: Citadel, 1971), pp. 155-7; Paul Sann, "Success Story: The Omnipotent Oom," in *Fads, Follies and Delusions of the American People* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1967).

[25] Douglas, *Spiritual Sex*, pp.192-3; cf. "The Ascent of Peter Coon," p.46-7.

[26] Quoted in Douglas, *Spiritual Sex*, p.195; cf. "The Ascent of Peter Coon," p.46-7.

[27] "Charter Document of the Tantrik Order in America," *International Journal of the Tantrik Order* 5, no.1 (1906), pp.96-7.

[28] Quoted in Sann, *Fads, Follies and Delusions of the American People*, p.190.

[29] Douglas, *Spiritual Sex*, p.195.

[30] Bernard, *Life: at the Clarkstown Country Club* (Nyack: Clarkstown Country Club, 1935). Bernard's estate contained some thirty-four buildings including a temple and a theater, dancing elephants, a gorilla named Gonzo, a tiger, a leopard, and enough exotic birds to fill an aviary (Randall, *Phantoms of the Hudson Valley,* pp.81f).

[31] Shepherd, ed., "Bernard, Pierre," p.104; Ward, "Pierre Arnold Bernard," p.39.

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[32] *Town and Country* (April 1941), quoted in Douglas, *Spiritual Sex*, p.198.

[33]Boswell, "The Great Fuss and Fume," p.32.

[34] "Tantrik Worship: The Basis of Religion," p. 71.

[35] Schopenhauer, quoted in *International Journal, Tantrik Order*, 5, no.1 (1906), p.71. "Of course the principal rites of Tantrik worshippers take place in secret and with closed doors. This secrecy is in accordance with the Tantrik precept'One should guard the Kaula system from uninitiated beastsjust as one guards moneyfrom thieves' [Kularnava Tantra]" ("In Re Fifth Veda: Theory and Practice of Tantra," *International Journal, Tantrik Order*, 5, no.1 [1906]: 27).

[36] *International Journal, Tantrik Order*, quoted in Sann, *Fads, Follies and Delusions*, p.190.

[37] Paul Sann, *Fad, Follies and Delusions*, p.189; cf. Shepherd, "Bernard, Pierre," p.104.

[38]Boswell, "The Great Fuss and Fume," p.32; see also Seabrook, *Witchcraft*, p.356.

[39] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, v. I,* p.45; Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society,* p.6-7. However, as Peter Gay points out, discussions of sexuality had to take place in the proper contexts either privately, in the closed realms of secrecy or, publicly, through the proper social conventions and scientific discourse (*The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud, Volume I: Education of the Senses* [New York, Oxford University Press 1984], pp.36ff.

[40] *International Journal, Tantrik Order* 5, no.1 (1906): 105.

[41] Seabrook, *Witchcraft*, p.356-7.

[42] *International Journal, Tantrik Order* 5, no.1 (1906): 91.

[43] "Tantrik Worship: The Basis of Religion," *International Journal, Tantrik Order* 5, no.1 (1906): 71. "The whole world is embodied in the woman Sex worship as a religion constitutes the basis of all that is sacred, holy

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and beautiful" ("In Re Fifth Veda," pp.35-6).

[44] Sir Monier monier Williams, *Religious Thought and Life in India*, p.196, quoted in "In Re Fifth Veda," p.45.

[45] "Tantrik Worship: The Basis of Religion," p.71.

[46]Boswell, The Great Fuss and Fume," p.33.

[47] King, *Sexuality, Magic and Perversion*, p.155; Ward, "Pierre Arnold Bernard," p.39.

[48] Quoted in King, *Sexuality, Magic and Perversion*, p.155.

[49] Douglas, *Spiritual Sex*, p.197.

[50] As John Maynard comments, the respectable classes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came to regard only one form of sexual relation to be proper and healthy namely heterosexual marriage. "Only the married life offered the via media between celibacy and licentiousness, which 'repairs the Fall and leads us from earth to heaven" ("Victorian Discourses on Sexuality and Religion', *University of Hartford Studies in Literature* 19 [1987]: 61).

[51]Boswell, "The Great Fuss and Fume Over the Omnipotent Oom," p. 85. "Oom the Omnipotent, the Loving Guru of the Tantriks is quite a fellow[H]e speaks Hindustani without an accent and dabbles in yoga, real estate, politics and purification" (Lardner, "Out of a Book," p.24).

[52] Sann, *Fad, Follies and Delusions,* p. 190.

[53]Boswell, "The Great Fuss and Fume Over the Omnipotent Oom," p. 91.

[54] Douglas *Spiritual Sex*, p.204.

[55] Randolph, *The Ansairetic Mystery: A New Revelation Concerning Sex!* (Toledo: Toledo Sun, Liberal Printing House, n.d. [c.1873]), reprinted in Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, p.317.

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[56] Crowley, *Liber CCCXXXIII: The Book of lies, which is also falsely called, Breaks: the wanderings or falsifications of the one thought of*

Frater Perdurabo, which thought is itself untrue (London: Wieland and Co., 1913), p.130.

[57] "Message from Master Therion (Aleister Crowley), *Constitution of the Ancient Order of Oriental Templars (O.T.O)* (1917), reproduced in R. Swinburne Clymer, *The Rosicrucian Fraternity in America: Authentic and Spurious Organizations* (Quakertown: The Rosicrucian Foundation, n.d), v.II, p.600.

[58] On the charges of sex magic brought against the Cathars and later the Templars, see King, *Sex, Magic and Perversion,* pp.170-1.

[59]Franklin Rosemont, Foreward to John Patrick Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph: A Nineteenth Century American Spiritualist, Rosicrucian and Sex Magician* (Albany: SUNY 1997), p.xv.

[60] Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, p.211ff. "The Nusa'iri of Ansairreh ...are a nominally Muslim group living...in isolated areas in the mountains of northwest Syria and Latakia... What has mainly set the Nusar'is apart and made them the object of persecution and massacre by the orthodox Muslims and by Druses, Ismailis and Crusaders alike is the belief that they practiced pagan and Gnostic sexual rites" (ibid., p.211). Some speculate that Randolph may have encountered Tantric practices in the course of his wanderings though there is no real evidence of this (Douglas, *Spiritual Sex,* p. 85).

[61] Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph,* p.218-9.

[62] Randolph, *The Mysteries of Eulis* (manuscript 1860) reproduced in Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph,* pp.339-40. See also *Eulis! The History of Love: Its Wondrous Magic, Chemistry, Rules, Laws, Modes and Rationale; Being the Third Revelation of Soul and Sex* (Toledo: Randolph Publishing Co., 1974); *Magia Seuxalis* (Paris: Robert Telin, 1931).

[63] Randolph. *The Mysteries of Eulis*, p.337. Randolph lists over a hundred uses for sexual magic, which include: Frustrating bad plans of others; Relating to money dealings, losses, gains and

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to forecast them; The grand secret of domestic happiness; To render a false husband, lover or wife sexively cold to others; To secretly penetrate others' designs (Machiavelli's power), The power of influencing others, solely financially , To derange the love relations of those not one's lover; The power of preparing amulets, and charging them with Aethae; To become immersed in

business spheres, to reliably direct others; The grand secret of life prolongation (pp.319-325).

[64] Randolph, *Magia Sexualis*, pp.76-8; cf. Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph,* p.183-4.

[65] Randolph, *Eulis!,* p.126; cf. Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph,* p.187. "No real magic power can or will descend into the soul of either except in the mighty moment, the orgasmal instant of BOTH not one alone! for then and then only do the mystic doors of the SOUL OPEN TO THE SPACES.The eternal spark within us (and which never flashes except when the loving female brings to her feet the loving man in their mutual infiltration of Soul, in the sexive death of both that intense moment when woman proves herself the superior of man mutual demise!) was created by ALLAH God himself" (*The Ansairetic Mystery,* in Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, p.314).

[66] Part of the power of Tantric ritual derives from its deliberate violation of laws of caste and purity; thus many rituals call for intercourse with prostitutes and outcasts (see Eliade, *Yoga*, p.261). On the deliberate use of impurity as a means of acquiring esoteric power, see Brooks, *Auspicious Wisdom*, pp.149ff. On Randolph's sex magic, see also Julius Evola, *The Metaphysics of Sex* (New York: Inner Traditions, 1983), p.272.

[67] On the techniques of semen retention, see White, *The Alchemical Body*, pp.199ff, and Eliade, *Yoga*, pp.267ff. Many scholars have argued that women are by no means empowered or liberated in Tantric ritual, but are used primarily as tools for optimizing the power of the male practitioner. Outside the confines of Tantric ritual, their subordinate place in the social order is seldom questioned. "Women...are made subordinate to males, and their ritual role is...limited to...being a partner for male adepts" (Brooks, *The Secret of the Three Cities,* pp.25-6).

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[68] Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, p.252.

[69] Kellner claims to have been initiated by the Arab fakir, Soliman ben Aifha and the Indian yogis Bhima Sen Pratap and Sri Mahatma Agamya Guru Paramahamsa, from whom he learned "the mysteries of yoga and the philosophy of the left hand path which he called sexual magic" (John Symonds, *The Magic of Aleister Crowley* [London: Frederick Muller, 1958], p. 95). On Reuss and his knowledge of Tantra, see A. R.Naylor, ed., *Theodor Reuss and Aleister Crowley, O.T.O. Rituals and Sexmagick* (Thames: Essex House, 1999). Peter Koenig argues that the O.T.O. was not founded by Kellner but only formed after his death under Reuss' leadership. Kellner was the head of a small group known as

the "Inner Triangle" and did practice some quasi-Tantric rites in which his wife acted as "the Great Goddess" and he as a "Babylonian Priest", in the attempt to create the "elixir, that is: male and female sexual fluids" ("Spermo Gnostics and the OTO," available on line at http://www.cyberlink.ch/~koenig/spermo.htm.

On the O.T.O. generally, see Ellic Howe and Helmut Moller, "Theodor Reuss: Irregular Freemasonry in Germany, 1900-1923," *Ars Quator Coronatorum* 91(1978): 28-46; Peter-Robert Koenig, "The OTO Phenomenon," *Theosophical History* 4, no.3 (1992): 92-8; "Theodor Reuss as Founder of Esoteric Orders,"*Theosophical History* 4, nos.6-7 (1993): 187-93.

[70] On the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor and its connections to Randolph and the OTO, see Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: SUNY, 1994), pp. 258ff, 347-61. Though drawing heavily on Randolph's sexual teaching, the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor warned against the dangerous excesses of sexual magic, which can lead men to madness and suicide: "The doctrines of Eulis as set forth by Randolph, teach that the concentration of the will at the moment of seminal emission...calls down the divine germs of spiritual powers... and that these become planted in the souls of those who call themWhen taken literally, the teachings of Eulis are an awful delusion and mean ruin to all who practice them...since they call down powers into the soul which fasten upon its vitalitySuch practices rear a swarm of vipers which will terminate the physical existence of their victims by suicide or drive them ashowling maniacs to the madhouse" ("The

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Mysteries of Eros," in Joscelyn Godwin, Christian Chanel, John Patrick Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor: Initiatic and Historical Documents of an Order of Practical Occultism* [New York: Samuel Weiser, 1995], p.213-78).

[71] *Oriflamme* (1904): 18, in Clymer, *The Rosicrucian Fraternity in America*, v.II, p.541. For a good discussion of Reuss' techniques of sex magic, see Koenig, "Spermo-Gnostics and the OTO:" "The whole body was considered Divine...and the sexual organs were meant to fulfill a peculiar function: a Holy Mass was the symbolic act of re-creating the universe....Sexually joining is a shadow of the cosmic act of creation. Performed by adepts, the union of male and female approaches the primal act and partakes of its divine nature...The sensations that form within Man and Woman sexually joined come not from the conjunction of the physical parts, but from the male and female sexual polarities in contact" (See also Theodor

Reuss' translation of Crowley's Gnostic Mass: "Die Gnostische Messe," reproduced in: P.R. Koenig, *Der Grosse Theodor Reuss Reader* [Muenchen 1997]; and Reuss: "Mysterica Mystica Maxima," *Jubilaeums-Ausgabe der Oriflamme 1912* [Baumann, Berlin und London 1912]).

[72] King, *The Magical World of Aleister Crowley* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1978), p.79. On homosexual rites, see Peter Koenig's chapter "Anal Intercourse and the O.T.O.," in *Das OTO-Phaenomen: An Agony in 22 fits*, translated on line at (http://home.sunrise.ch/~prkoenig/phenomen.htm) . Koenig summarizes the higher degrees follows: "VII° Adoration of the phallus as Baphomet, both within and without; VIII° Interaction with something outside the closed vessels of the vagina and the anus; IX° Interaction inside the vagina with either the blood or the secretions of a woman when excited; X° Impregnation + fertilisation of an egg + the act of creation; XI° Two-fold: i) Isolation in the anus where it is considered unable to interact with anything; ii) interaction with excrement and small amounts of blood... and the mucous membranes that lead into the blood supply."

[73] King, *The Magical World,* p.79. "To invoke a god into themselves. .. and set into flaming activity all the subjective psychological factors symbolized by a particular deity, the practitioners mentally concentrated on the form of the god through intercourse, building up a creative

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visualization of his or her form and imagining that it had a life of its own. At orgasm they attempted to transfer their own consciousness to that of the image, blending their personalities into one" (ibid., pp.79-80).

[74] "Sex, for Randolph, was a sacrament and nothing less than a means to a holy communion of souls. ..He hedges it round with taboos: it should not be enjoyed frequently or promiscuously, never with any corm of contraception, and absolutely never with the same sex. Nothing could be further from the sexual magic later developed by the Ordo Templi Orientis" (Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment,* p.255-6; cf. p.361).

[75] King, *The Magical World,* p.100. Crowley's main texts on sex magic include: *Of the Nature of the Gods; Liber Agape – the Book of the Unveiling of the Sangraal de Arte Magica;* and *Of the Homunculus,* most of which are included in Francis King, ed. *The Secret Rituals of the O.T.O.* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1973).

[76] Crowley, "The Temple of Solomon the King," in *Equinox I* (4) (London 1910), p.150. On Crowley's possible Tantric influences, see Lawrence Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt: A Life of Aleister Crowley* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), pp.92, 127, 141, 188. As Evola suggests, "Apart from satanic, heathen and deliberate scandalizing elements, the Law of Thelema was in fact inspired by Tantrism" (*The Metaphysics of Sex*, p.264).

[77] Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, p.141

[78] Douglas, *Spiritual Sex*, p.208; Elizabeth Sharpe, *The Secrets of the Kaula Circle* (London: Luzac & Co., 1936): "I met a European who was one of X.Y.Z.'s pupils. He called himself by a number. In the beginning he was extremely handsome, afterwards he grew gross...He had many women at his disposal... He learnt many magical processes by which he drew into his circle great phantoms...He had with him a pupil, a thin. long-nosed boy.. .I wondered why he had followed the man whose number was 666...666 wore a ceremonial robe, had a pentacle, a wand a sword and a cup ...I watched that day the spirits he evoked with the help of the Lamas ...I saw 666 fall to the ground frothing at the mouth" (pp.48-9).

[79] Crowley, *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley,* p.767; parenthetical words supplied by Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, p.216. On Crowley's sex magic and its relation to the OTO, see Koenig, "Spermo-Gnostics and the OTO: "Crowley's VIIIth degree unveiled... that masturbating on a sigil of a demon or meditating upon the image of a phallus would bring power or communication with a divine being.. The IXth degree labelled heterosexual intercourse where the sexual secrets were sucked out of the vagina and when not consumed...put on a sigil to attract this or that demon to fulfill the pertinent wish...In his "Emblems and Mode of Use" Crowley describes the method of how to smear sperm on a talisman in order to attract for example money."

[80] Crowley, "The Law of Liberty: A Tract of Therion, Issued by the Ordo Templi Orientis," reproduced in Clymer, *The Rosicrucian Fraternity in America*, v.II, p.572. As Crowley writes in his *Confessions*, "Mankind must learn that the sexual instinct is...ennobling. The shocking evils which we all deplore are due to perversions produced by suppressions. The feeling that it is shameful and the sense of sin cause concealmentcreates neurosis and ends in explosion. We produce an abscess and wonder... why it bursts in stench and corruptionThe Book of the Law solves the sexual problem completely. Each individual has an

absolute right to satisfy his sexual instinct...The one injunction is to treat al such acts as sacraments" (pp. 874-5).

[81] King, *The Magical World of Aleister Crowley*, p.82. A detailed record of the Paris workings is contained in two manuscripts, *The Book of High Magick Art* and the *Esoteric Record*, compiled by Neuberg. As Symonds comments, "Sex became for him the means to reach God. It was his vehicle of consecration...In his eyes every sex act was a sacred magical act, a sacrament. A prolonged orgy in honor of the great god Pan" (*The Great Beast,* p. 135).

[82] "Crowley indicated both women and drugs as the means to cause openings or breakages of ordinary consciousness and to enter into...relations with supersensual beings. The orgasm of coitus (as also the effect of drugs) led to openings of consciousness toward the supersensual. ..The technique...was that of excess; through pain or pleasure, sex or intoxication, it was necessary to attain condition of exhaustion taken to the extreme limit" (Evola, *The Metaphysics of Sex*, pp.264, 266;cf. Symonds, *The Magic of Aleister Crowley,* pp.147ffl 48, 130-1).

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[83] Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, p.244ff.

[84] Symonds, *The Magic of Aleister Crowley*, pp.141-2.

[85] Crowley, *The Vision and the Voice* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, 1911), p.385-6. On the creation of alchemical androgynes, see Urban, "Birth Done Better: Conceiving the Immortal Fetus in India, China and Renaissance Europe," in *Notes from a Mandala: Essays in Honor of Wendy Doniger*, ed. Laurie Patton (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2000).

[86] "There was some close connection between sexuality and geniusThe divine consciousness which is reflected in the works of Genius feeds upon a certain secretion...analogous to semen... This point of view bears a relationship to certain Tantric teachings according to which *ojas*, a subtle essence derived fromsemen, fills the lower centers of the adept, rises through subtle passagesto the top of the spine and goes through a transformation which results in the physical body being flooded with a divine essence" (King, *The Magical World,* pp.97-8).

[87] See Symonds, *The Magic of Aleister Crowley,* pp.99-100.

[88] Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt* pp.243-4.

[89] Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, p.239.

[90] Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, p.274.

[91] There is a vast array of such books; see for starters, Christopher S. Hyatt, and Lon Milo Duquette, *Sex Magic, Tantra and Tarot: The Way of the Secret Lover* (New Falcon Pub., 1991); Christopher S. Hyatt, S. Jason Black, *Tantra Without Tears* (New Falcon Pub., 2000); Donald Michael Kraig, Linda Falorio, Tara Nema, *Modern Sex Magick : Secrets of Erotic Spirituality* (St. Paul: Llewellyn Pub., 1998); Dolores Ashcroft-Nowicki, *The Tree of Ecstasy : An Advanced Manual of Sexual Magic* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1999) .

[92] Bernard, "Tantrik Worship: The Basis of Religion," p.71.

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[93] Randolph, *The Ansairetic Mystery*, in Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph,* pp.316-7.

[94] Jeffrey Tye, "Tantra: Sex Magic. Sex Magic Reality Creation Process," available on the "Church of Tantra" web-site (http://www.tantra.org/sexmagic.html).

[95] Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, p.255.

[96] Garrison, *The Yoga of Sex* (New York: Julian Press), quoted in Douglas, *Spiritual Sex*, p.222. For a similar celebration of Tantra, see Rawson, *The Art of Tantra*: "Tantra is a cult of ecstasy, focused on a vision of cosmic sexuality" (p.9).

[97] Ginsberg, *Indian Journals*, *March 1962-May 1963* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1970), p.93.

[98] Margo Anand, *The Art of Sexual Ecstasy: The Path of Sacred Sexuality for Western Lovers* (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., 1989), pp. 44, 41.

[99] On Rajneesh and Trungpa, see Urban, "The Cult of Ecstasy," and "Zorba the Buddha: Capitalism, Charisma and the Cult of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh," *Religion* 26 (1996): 161-82. Decrying modern Western civilization as hypocritical and repressed, Rajneesh proclaimed Tantra as a new-religionless religion based on absolute liberation of the body and sexuality: "Tantra says everything has to be absorbed, *everything!*...without any condition. Sex has to be absorbed, then it becomes a tremendous force in you. A Buddha...a Jesus, they have such a magnetic force around what is that? Sex absorbed" (*Tantra: the Supreme Understanding* [Poona, Rajneesh Foundation, 1975],p.100).

[100] Das and Silbey, "American Tantra," (http://www.tantra.org/amertan.html).

[101] Fra. Geh Mad, "Developmental Technique for Tantra/Sex Magic," on the web-site http://www.greendome.org/archives/tantra/tantra.html.

[102] Koenig, "The McDonaldisation of Occulture" (http://www.cyberlink.ch/~koenig/mcdonald.htm).

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[103] From the "Tantra Works" website (http://www.tantraworks.com/tantrausa2.html#NTO) . "It's wondrous, exhilarating and true; you can use sexual pleasure as a guide to spiritual fulfillment. Not only is the sensual path enriching and joyful, but it's delightfully accessible with Tantra... [S]piritual sex liberates body and soul. A revolutionary movement sure to be a watershed in the coming millennium, spiritual sex celebrates the mystical aspects of sexuality while revealing the secrets that allow men and women to reach a zenith of ecstasy" (ibid.).

[104] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* volume I, pp.6-7.